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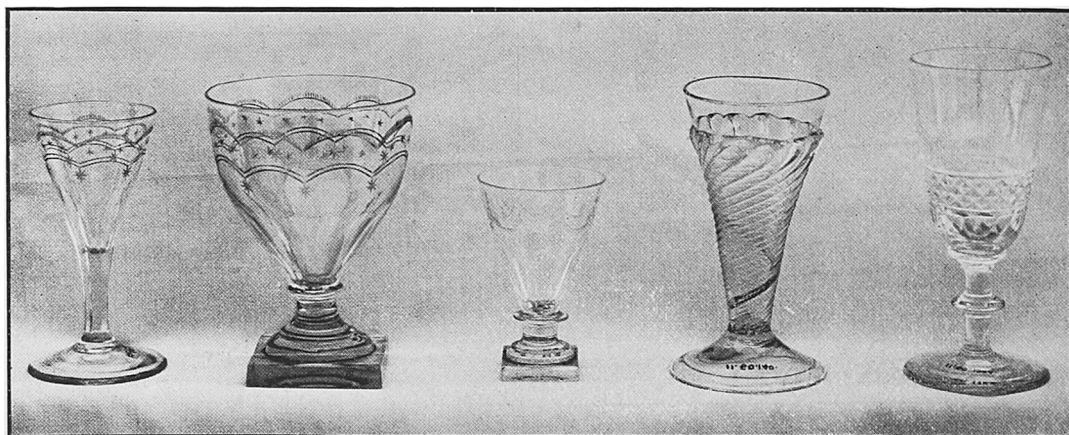
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BLOWN, CUT AND ETCHED GLASS IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

## THE ROMANCE OF GLASS

BY VIRGINIA ROBIE

*Author of "By-Paths in Collecting"*

TO the art of glassmaking each nation has made important contributions; Bohemia for color, France for design, England for clarity, Austria for decoration and Italy for high technical skill. Yet the grace of English design, the brilliancy of old Spanish specimens, the art of early Bohemia, the charm of Russian examples, and the beauty of nearly everything marked "Venetian," cannot be denied. Rather, each country has given something unique in the way of outline, color and ornament.

Glassmaking in common with other crafts has waxed and waned, reaching high degrees of excellence and dropping to low standards of taste. When furniture showed simple, beautiful lines glass closely followed. When wooden surfaces were covered with jig-saw carving, glass kept equal pace.

Imagine a Sheraton sideboard set forth with half a dozen contemporaneous pieces of glass. Picture a mid-Victorian sideboard similarly decked. The decanters of the latter would be nearly as heavy as the marble top, and every inch of surface would be embellished.

"Feel the weight" the proud owner in the eighteen sixties probably said, and "How light in the hand" the happy possessor in the seventeen eighties. Each to his taste, but later standards have always been in favor of severe lines and restricted ornament.

So in choosing old glass for our cabinets or new for our tables,

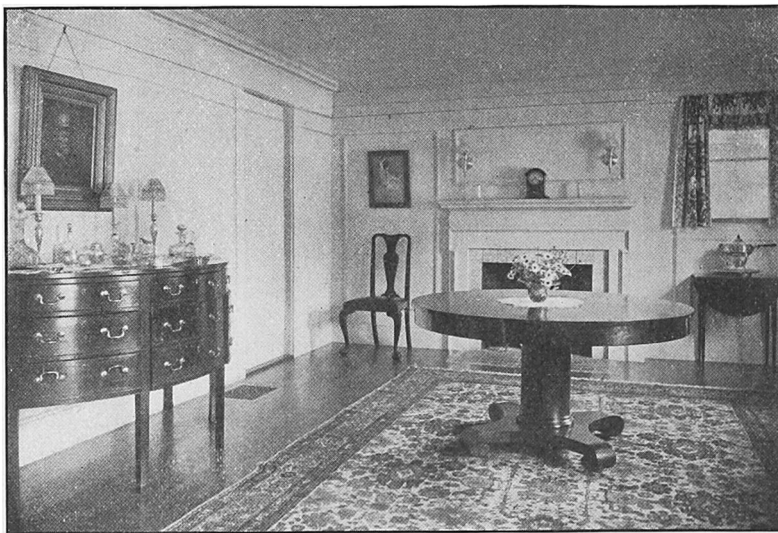
we seek designs which turn back for more than a century, rather than those which by a stretch of the imagination we almost remember. There may be engraving and cutting and even brilliant color, but there is also purity of form, refinement and fitness. If for table use there is transparency—the distinctive quality of glass, never a substance which raises a question as to its composition.

The beautiful opaque pieces now offered for sale in the shops have value for decorative purposes. Their color range is extensive and the designs are unusually attractive. But for drinking-glasses of all types, whether for "pain water" as they say in Scotland, or for what Artemus Ward called the "more important fluids," the clearest crystal qualities are expressed. Such pieces may be pure white or ruby red, pale green or dark amethyst, the limpid characteristics demanded by Ruskin are conspicuous.

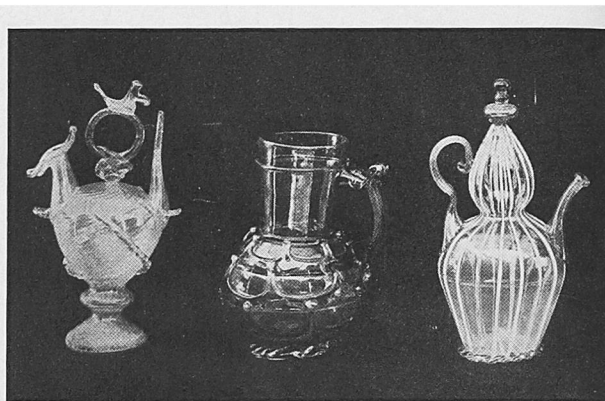
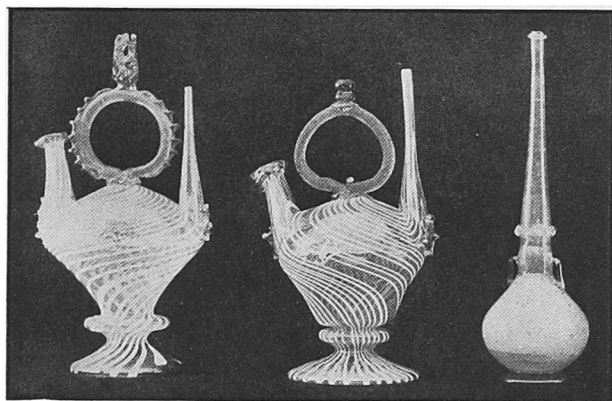
The author of "Stones in Venice" denounced the cut-glass of his day in no uncertain terms and lauded the blown and spun specimens of Venetian origin. Later critics have agreed with Ruskin in the main issue but call attention to the charm and

refinement of English and Irish designing in the eighteenth century.

The origin of glassmaking is lost in obscurity and buried in legends. Very old examples exist in our museums and in many private collections. The taste of a few distinguished collectors has turned to prehistoric examples, iridescent with age and the action of sun and



DINING-ROOM IN COLONIAL STYLE, SHOWING OLD GLASSWARE ON SIDBOARD



SPANISH GLASSWARE AFTER THE VENETIAN MANNER

air. The beauty and importance of the Cesnola collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art are well known and other and smaller collections could be mentioned, more or less familiar to the public.

The attention of many people is now directed toward American glassware or to those pieces imported during the Colonial period. Another group is interested in the best examples of Continental Europe, still another in English and Irish glassware of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while a few far-sighted individuals are gathering fine modern pieces and reverently placing them behind the traceried doors of corner cabinets. Collections a hundred years hence will be the richer thereby, and Favre, Nancy and other beautiful creations may bring prices now paid for Waterford, Stiegel and Derby Spar.

There are specialists among the specialists and many subdivisions. One person may care only for Stiegel of the green flint variety, another devotes time and energy to amber Bohemian, a third buys purple glass and places no limit on age or country, a fourth makes early American bottles the objective point, a fifth seeks wine-glasses of the late seventeenth century, a sixth discards everything but Jacobite drinking-vessels engraved with Stuart emblems, a seventh hunts enameled glass of undoubted Teutonic origin, an eighth prefers cloudy Bristol with overglaze decorations, a ninth grows reckless over Derby Spar, a tenth swears by Waterford, an eleventh sees beauty only in rare Venetian, a twelfth hoards old French cut-work, and a thirteenth gathers in glass paperweights of the early Victorian period. Nor will a baker's dozen dispose of the specializing or the hobbies within hobbies. No matter from what angle the quest is viewed, the pursuit is

instructive, absorbing and frequently expensive.

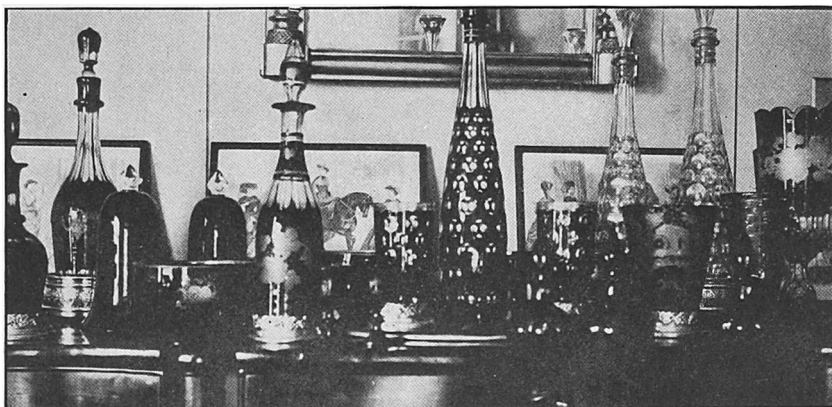
Glassmaking affords a fascinating study with its varied chapters of prehistoric, early Roman and Medieval achievements. To Venice belongs not only the honor of producing the most perfect glassware of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, but of exerting a wide influence on all glassmaking countries. Venetian artisans carried the secrets of their craft into Bohemia, Spain and France. As early as the twelfth century Seville, Valencia and Caspe in Aragon had their "glass houses" in which were produced articles of many colors. The guild of glassmakers founded in 1445 at Barcelona is mentioned by a contemporary historian, who enumerates "vessels of varying quality and shape competing with the Venetian are exported to Rome and other places."

One hundred years later the inventory of the Duke of Albuquerque includes "a white box with four bottles of Valencia glass containing ointment for the hands, also a large glass cup with two lizards for handles and two lizards on the cover, and a large cup of Barcelona glass blown with gold." Spanish documents contain many references to Valencia and Barcelona glass usually adding the highest praise which could then be bestowed—"as fine as Venetian," or "as good as that which comes from Venice," etc.

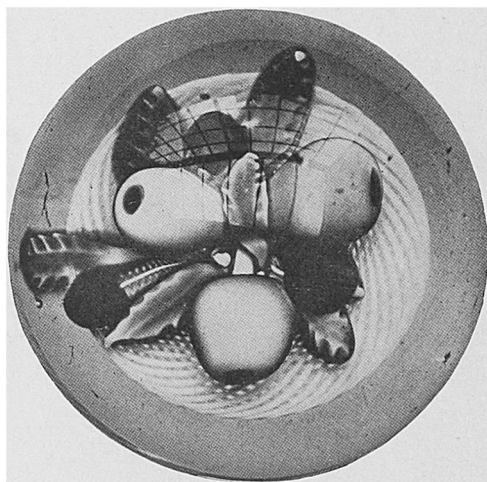
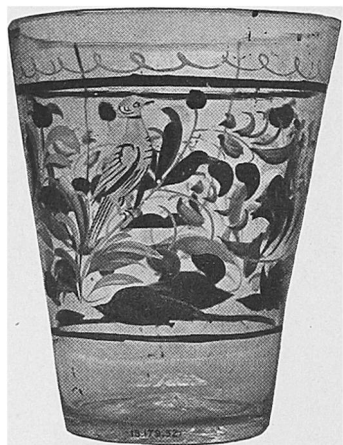
America's chapter begins with the date 1608, when a primitive industry was established near Jamestown.

America's part in the great craft story can never be ignored. From the earliest crude bit of blown glass to the latest achievements in Favre every link in the chain is important. Not that everything made in America has express beauty—far from it.

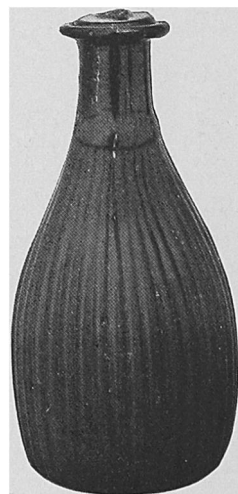
Within the memory of many people are baskets of opalescent glass lined with cold



OLD BOHEMIAN IN RUBY, SAPPHIRE AND AMBER TONES

STIEGEL TUMBLER  
ENAMELED DECORATION

PAPER-WEIGHT OF MILLEFIORE GLASS

RARE DECANTER WITH  
MUSHROOM STOPPER

blue or chilly green, vases of milky hue painted in gaudy flowers, and tableware unattractive in design and heavy as lead. Many of these absurdities were inspired by the foreign glass exhibits at the Centennial in Philadelphia when taste the world over was at a low ebb. We expressed ourselves in better terms a hundred years earlier just as did English and French designers.

Long before the colonists made pottery they established glass factories. According to Edward Allen Barber, who has done so much to aid and stimulate the collector, the earliest date of glass-making in the colonies is the one mentioned, 1608, and the second, 1622, when a factory for the manufacture of glass beads for trade purposes with the Indians was founded in Virginia. Convenient dates to remember are 1769, the founding of the Manheim works in Pennsylvania by Baron Henry Stiegel, that most picturesque of early American craftsmen, 1771, the erecting of the Dyottville plant at Kensington, near Philadelphia, 1775, the Whitney Glass Works, founded at Glassboro, New Jersey, and 1790, the beginning of the glass industry in Baltimore. Kensington, Glassboro and Baltimore have continued to be great producing centers, holding the records among native industries. The Baron's activities ended in 1774, after five years of successful attainment. Stiegel glass brings high prices at present and is growing more valuable every day. A recent collection of one hundred and fifteen pieces sold for fifty-five hundred dollars, a large figure even for rare specimens.

The present interest in everything marked "Americana" has greatly stimulated the quest for old glass. For a long period native pieces were regarded lightly, if regarded at all by the rank and file of collectors, although a few individuals have long gathered and cornered.

"But glass," says the enthusiastic collector of Staffordshire, "looks so insignificant when combined with old blue." Quite true. But why group glass and

china together? The combination is as incongruous as lace and pewter, brass and ivory, copper and egg-shell porcelain. Glass needs a cabinet to itself, where it will develop a wealth of possibilities.

Even if attention is confined to so-called white glass, there is a wide range in tint. And if old European specimens are under consideration, there is a great variety of tone. Old red Bohemian rivals the most brilliant of ruby lusters. Old Venetian vies with all the luminous glazed ware of Italy and Spain. A collection of old American bottles will contain a color gamut so varied that all the colors of the spectrum are represented in countless gradations.

The glass which one is liable to pick up in the every-day channels is usually pressed, occasionally blown, rarely cut. It often takes the form of salt cellars, sauce dishes, cup plates, etc., with an occasional decanter or goblet. Toddy glasses are among the most interesting things which congregate with old plates and teapots. They suggest the good old days of Colonial cheer better than anything else except punch bowls. They have a fascinating way of never being quite perfect, of having a bubble here and a depression there; a happy accident giving each an individuality. People who devote much time to glass declare that it is far more personal and human than china, and that each piece is a story in itself. There are so many kinds, and each kind has so many divisions, that a small collection, if well chosen, will give great satisfaction.

Seldom is a collection begun deliberately. A sauce dish with a border of strawberry leaves perhaps is the first acquisition, or a cup plate showing Bunker Hill, or a toddy glass engraved with an eagle, or a Waterford honey jar, or possibly a decanter of old Bohemian red with the grape-vine, or a bit of green Stiegel or a sugar basket of deepest blue, set in a silver stand. Any one of these furnishes an excellent excuse to begin. The difficulty is to find an excuse to stop, once interest is aroused.

WINEGLASS WITH  
AIR-TWIST STEM